

Common Border, Common Bond
The Chambre de commerce de Québec and
The Société des relations internationales de Québec
James H. Douglas
Governor of Vermont
Thursday, June 9, 2005

Madame la ministre Monique Gagnon-Tremblay, je vous remercie beaucoup pour cet aimable présentation et je vous remercie aussi pour ces plusieurs années de service pour vos concitoyens du Québec.

Au nom de mes concitoyens du Vermont, je voudrais remercier Madame Francine Lortie et la Chambre de Commerce de Québec, ainsi que Madame Juliette Champagne et la Société des Relations Internationales pour son aimable invitation et pour son hospitalité.

Je voudrais aussi remercier le Maire Jean-Paul L'Allier pour s'être joint à nous et pour avoir accueilli notre délégation dans cette superbe ville.

C'est un honneur pour nous tous, d'être ici aujourd'hui, côtoyant, dans cette magnifique capitale, les citoyens de votre province pleine de vie.

Long before we had a common border, indeed, before there was any border, common or otherwise, Quebec and Vermont shared a familiar bond.

This bond, forged by Samuel de Champlain's exploration of the territories we now call home, has resulted in an uncommon—even exceptional—relationship among our people.

This relationship is exhibited in our cultural and economic commerce; our common commitment to issues of great regional importance—trade, environmental protection, public safety—in our strong family ties; and in a personal way, my friendship with Premier Charest who has been a tremendous partner in the advancement of our mutual interests.

I'm fond of noting that our shared commercial interests date back to 1777, the year Vermont created itself. By declaring itself independent of the competing claims of New York and New Hampshire, Vermont became the first American government without a seacoast. Its act of self-creation was not widely celebrated by the original thirteen United States and Vermont existed as an independent republic for 14 years.

To our founders, Quebec represented a logical economic partnership. Though plans for a canal linking Lake Champlain with the St. Lawrence were never realized, well into the 19th century northern Vermont saw Quebec as its primary trade partner. Even during the War of 1812 Vermonters maintained that commerce despite the best efforts of the federal government. To this day Vermont's landscape is sprinkled with place names, such as Smuggler's Notch, that commemorate that illicit trade.

Over time, however, Vermont's economic and political interests drew it closer to our sister states. As Vermont's interests turned south, so did the eyes of many Quebec residents. During the last half of the 19th Century French-Canadians moved south to work in Vermont mills, on her farms, and in her logging industry. The results of that migration are still notable today. The largest percentage of native-born Vermonters is of French-Canadian ancestry. In my hometown of Middlebury, Vermont a significant percentage—perhaps as much as 20 percent—of the residents trace their heritage back to Quebec.

Our contemporary history has been marked by a steady increase in areas of economic development. Vermont now draws a significant portion of its power from Hydro-Quebec, a relationship for which I am grateful, and manufacturing and other business interests on both sides of the border have joined in a robust trade.

Together, we are beginning to build the economic infrastructures that were once the dream of our forefathers.

Our mutual commitment to economic security is matched only by our dedication to the environment. Through the pursuit of renewable energy, energy efficiency and conservation we are leading others on a path to economic and environmental prosperity.

In Vermont, I've worked hard to offer an alternative to the often-impassioned contest between those who seek economic growth and those who seek environmental preservation. Because the reality is without the value of one, you cannot enjoy the value of the other.

This third way—the Vermont Way—resists the impulses of inflexible ideology and recognizes that our economies and environment are codependent.

I call it the Vermont Way because Vermonters have a long and patient history of making careful, considered and responsible decisions to guide our future. Our deep love of our land, and our intimate compact communities, is passed down from generation to generation and passed on to those who visit our wonderful state.

The Vermont way is first and foremost about people. It is about our economic security, our health and our way of life. It is not left of center, nor is it right of center—it is the center.

This alternative view of public policy envelops the different way we do things in Vermont, as compared to other states and our federal government, and it is a perspective I know the people of this province share.

We are leaders in this vision, models for our nations in this area—we know that the choice we face today is not between jobs or the environment, it is a choice between both or neither.

That is why Premier Charest and I agreed that much of this trade mission—much of the dialogue among our staff—must focus on our mutual environmental interests.

I noted earlier how fortunate we are to enjoy a longstanding partnership with our friends at Hydro-Quebec. This clean, reliable power does not contribute to Carbon Dioxide or Sulphur Dioxide emissions. Thanks to this relationship, Vermont enjoys one of the cleanest energy profiles in America.

Currently, 15 percent of our generation is from a variety of instate renewable sources. When we add Hydro-Quebec to the equation, half of our overall supply is renewable and our aggregate emissions per megawatt-hour are more than an order of magnitude below our nation's average.

We also enjoy the work of an aggressive energy efficiency utility, Efficiency Vermont that delivers cost-effective energy efficiency solutions to employers and residents.

Meanwhile in southern New England the wholesale power market continues its evolution. While the institution of a de-regulated system in the rest of New England led to dramatic increases in generating capacity in the 1990's it has also been marked by price instability. I expect that Vermont's reluctance to join its neighbours in this effort will prove to be a very wise decision indeed.

As states in our region experience double-digit rate increases, Vermont enjoys stable sources of energy that are increasingly competitive in our market. But there is still much more that we must do.

We are currently in the midst of an inclusive and extended public discussion of our future energy portfolio. This dialogue solicits strong points of view, and raises challenging questions.

How much of our power can be provided by existing and new renewable sources? How much commercial wind development is appropriate along our ridgelines? What are the merits of acquiring additional renewable energy from development outside our state? How much of our demand for energy can be tempered by a commitment to greater efficiency?

Questions we hope that you, our friends, might help us to answer.

While Vermont faces some constraints in our ability to develop large-scale solutions entirely within our own borders, we view renewable energy strategies as important to our economy, the environment and toward building a diverse and sustainable long-term power supply.

We are fortunate to host some leading renewable energy companies such as Northern Power Systems and NRG. These companies are exporting value added technology and services to global players in the energy field and they are helping to guide this important dialogue.

Given the very real need to limit the effects of—and I hope one day halt—global climate change, energy policy will require social and economic systems that adapt to an increasingly important environmental responsibilities. In addition, Vermont and Quebec can ill afford to see our economies constrained by a lack of resources, particularly in the face of increasing global competition. Instead we must address this issue on multiple fronts that include technological advancement, continued investment in alternative sources, and a broad cultural adjustment.

One area that is of particular interest to me—in part because it delivers a three-fold benefit of energy production, enhancing the security of our agricultural economy, and limiting phosphorous runoff in our waterways—are efforts to harness increasing amounts of, well, farm-based methane to generate electricity.

I know Premier Charest shares my commitment to improving and protecting lakes Champlain and Memphremagog and I am very grateful for his support of our ambitious Clean and Clear Water Action Plan—a multi-year, multi-million dollar effort to clean up Lake Champlain and other waterways.

Together, we are taking the first tangible measures in recent memory to mitigate persistent pollution problems in our lakes, rivers, and streams.

We are establishing limits on phosphorus runoff—a pollutant that promotes excessive growth of algae and poses a serious water quality problem. In some areas, significant algae growth causes massive floating mats that close beaches, impact tourism, impede recreation, and release dangerous toxins.

One way for us to achieve a reduction of phosphorus in our waterways is to support an innovative new program offered by Central Vermont Public Service dubbed Cow Power to stimulate the development of methane generation on our farms.

Efforts like these are increasingly important as we seek to meet the accelerated cleanup of Lake Champlain—an effort the Premier and I hope to achieve by 2009 to coincide with the quadricentennial celebration of the lake's exploration by Samuel de Champlain.

As I suggested earlier, Mr. Champlain's exploration of our territories is a major contributing factor to our bond.

Though we are now more sensitive to the impact of European exploration on native cultures, there remains a strong appreciation of those who were drawn to the blank areas of maps; to those driven to chart the uncharted.

We can still imagine what it must have been like not knowing what, or who, awaited around every river bend; we can still imagine the constant sense of wonder inspired by exploring a new world.

Our persisting sense of wonder was amply illustrated in 1909 when Vermont celebrated the tercentenary of Champlain's arrival on the lake that now bears his name. In Burlington alone over 60,000 people gathered for the celebration. Ninety-six years later that remains one of the largest gatherings in the history of Vermont. (Perhaps, second only to last summer's Phish concert in Coventry.)

Imagination, alas, has its downside as well. I, for one, try not to dwell on the fact that Champlain was only 43 when he first canoed out on to the Lake. By then he had already explored what is now Panama, as well as eastern Canada, founded Quebec, and established French claims to Canada.

For those of us for whom 43 is a distant memory, this can lead to somewhat discouraging comparisons.

And yet, though the maps have been filled and borders drawn, we are here on our own voyage of discovery. Where Champlain ranged across the common borders of Iroquois and Algonquin, the people of Vermont and Quebec routinely cross our borders to forge and strengthen our economic and cultural ties.

Vermont's 1909 celebration of Champlain recognized our common heritage and intertwined economies. Among the 1909 participants were the ambassadors of England and France; political and religious leaders from Canada and Quebec, and the president of the United States.

Looking back on the event Vermont Governor George Prouty noted that "the Tercentenary Celebration was the beginning of a movement of great publicity and has resulted in exploiting the beauties of the State and its agricultural and manufacturing advantages as has nothing else in its history."

Now, as Quebec looks forward to celebrating its quadracentennial in 2008, Vermont, New York and Quebec will also join together in 2009 for a yearlong commemoration of our commitment to the rich cultural, environmental and historical significance of this region; a celebration of our common ties, our economic and environmental health, and of those alliances that enhance the free exchange of products and ideas.

As time marches forward, and as we can see today, these relationships remain quite strong.

So here today more than 50 Vermonters join me in this mission to thank you for your continued commitment to the interests shared across a common boundary and fortified by common bonds—Encore, merci beaucoup.

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